ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A communication system including a transmitter, a receiver, and a serial link, that is capable of transmitting packets of data (e.g., frames of video data) over the link. The transmitter and receiver are operable in any selected one of a transmission mode (in which the data are transmitted over the link from the transmitter to the receiver) and a mute mode in which transmission of data over the link has been interrupted. Typically in the transmission mode, encrypted video data are transmitted and decrypted by the receiver. Other aspects of the invention are transmitters and receivers for use in, and methods implemented by, any embodiment of such system. Typically, each transition between transmission mode and mute mode operation requires that the device undergoing the transition (whether a transmitter or receiver) receives a warning that the transition is to occur. In response to such warning, a transmitter in the transmission mode waits for the next packet boundary, or more generally the Nth packet boundary after the warning, before entering the mute mode. If the transmitter encrypts video during the transmission mode, the cipher engine is allowed to finish its work on the current frame (and any other frame to be encrypted before entry into the mute mode) but is not allowed to send any signal that affects any frame occurring after entry into the mute mode. When the transmitter and receiver include cipher engines, each cipher engine including a state machine, operation of the state machines should freeze during the mute mode, and the cipher engines' outputs should be driven to black or another predetermined state or otherwise hidden or suppressed.